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"SURREY CHAPEL."

A LECTURE

BY

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ON

ROWLAND HILL,

His Times and Eccentricities.

DELIVERED IN

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

MONTREAL.

1887(?)
M416

[1887?]

LECTURE.

ROWLAND HILL.

I do not claim for this lecture any originality. The names, dates and historical portions of it have been culled from varous sources; and these I have linked together, with a few thoughts and opinions of my own. This was done after some weeks of indisposition, and during my hours of convalescence. The study of this remarkable man, who was both clergyman and philanthropist, has been entertaining and useful to myself, and I hope that it will be so to all those who may listen to me.

In some respects Rowland Hill deserved to be kindly remembered, as well as Whitefield, Wesley, and other religious reformers. A man who spent a long life, a large fortune, and who died in the work of blessing and saving his fellow men, should not be forgotten. For a very long period his name was a common household word; and as "ointment poured forth" in England and Wales, and it was not unknown in Ireland and Scotland.

The Hills are an ancient and highly respectable family and of a very honorable stock. One of their ancestors was the first Protestant Lord Mayor of London, and was knighted by the King during his term of office, while others earned distinction by their valor in the British army. The Hill family seat was at Hawkstone, Shropshire. Sir Rowland, the father, was "the squire," and, to some extent, the ruler and autocrat of the place. The squires of those days were little kings; their word was law in the villages, on the estate and in the family. Sir Rowland, although kind and generous by nature, as "the squire" was somewhat exacting and imperious, requiring submission and implicit obedience from all, especially those of his own household.

Young Rowland was born in the month of August, 1744, being one hundred and forty-three years ago. He died in faith and hope when nearly ninety years old. As a boy he appears to have been strong and healthy, full of good nature, fun and frolic and running over with wit and humor, always happy and kind to others. Being a healthy, romping, happy boy, his friends found it difficult to get him to confine himself to any consecutive study until he was in his teens.

It is said that at the age of ten, he was a poor speller, and a worse writer, and that up to that age there was but little promise of his ever making any *mark* in the world. But this is not a very unusual thing, as the best fruit often ripens slowly, and retains its sweetness and perfection longer, than if grown in a green house, where it is forced by unnatural means. Some of our greatest men have been known to be "dull boys" at school. They attained to great eminence by patient plodding, rather than by any natural or mental superiority. Sir Isaac Newton says he was much like other boys, only he had a little more *patience*, and Carey, the famous linguist, once remarked that he was simply "a plodder." Both became great by plodding and patience, after their boyhood's days were gone.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.

Some minds develop slowly and continue to grow, while others develop early and rapidly and soon reach their highest point, then fall, like the stick of a rocket, into the groove of commonplace things. Rowland Hill could hardly be called great in any sense, except that of moral greatness —goodness and usefulness. And I take it that that is really the best and greatest of all greatness. In this sense he became pre-eminently great.

EDUCATION.

He received his early education at the Shrewsbury Grammar School, and afterwards he spent several years at Eton, where he made considerable progress. His teachers and surroundings were all favorable to study, competition was keen and constant, and his elder sister Jane and other members of the family, being anxious that he should, if possible, make up for lost time, constantly urged him to work and study hard, so that he might leave with credit and honor to himself. Eton, like Rugby, has always been famous for the manly training given to the boys. It is said that the Duke of Wellington used to remark that he owed his victory at Waterloo and other famous battles, in great

measure, to the manliness and courage of boys trained at Eton and other English public schools.

Rowland went from Eton to Cambridge, from which University he received his B.A. and M.A. So that he was by no means the uneducated and uncouth parson, as some of his traducers have represented him to be. Having finished his education, and which is more important still, had become an earnest Christian and evangelist, he sought ordination and a place among the clergy, in the church of his fathers.

EVANGELIST.

But his conduct as a voluntary Evangelist, preaching and holding meetings in private houses, barns, and in the open air, when and wherever opportunities were presented, had been so "irregular" that the Bishop refused for a long time to ordain him, or to permit him to preach in the churches.

Having been refused some five or six times, he was at length ordained deacon, and was appointed to the parish of Kingston, Somersetshire, where he remained about a year. But on account of his "perpetual irregularities," the Archbishop of York refused to admit him to any higher grade in the Church. So Rowland used to say that he ran away from Mother Church with only one ecclesiastical boot on.

PERSECUTION.

While at Cambridge, "pure and undefiled religion" was at a discount, and the few who spoke out for Christ suffered not a little persecution. For visiting the sick, and those in prison, and holding meetings in private houses, five or six of the students were formally and solemnly expelled. It is difficult to understand why young Rowland was not also expelled, for he seemed to be the most zealous offender of them all. He says that no one in the college ever gave him a cordial smile but the old shoe black at the gate, who had the love of Christ in his heart.

Being frank and honest to a degree, he could not make any compromise with conscience and therefore remained outside the church of his father's, and for ten years England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales were his parish. A Nonconformist minister [the Rev. Cornelius Winter] collected money and bought him a pony, on which he rode through the moral wilderness like John the Baptist, calling sinners to repentance, as with a voice of thunder, wherever he went. Although he suffered all kinds of persecution, trials, perils and privations, he never lacked hearers. Crowds flocked to hear him, especially in London, where he has been known to address as many as twenty thousand people at one meeting. He often went forth in true apostolic order "without purse or scrip," and, like Abraham, hardly knowing whither he went. He worked and walked by faith; God guiding and working in him and by him, and blessing his preaching in the conversion of sinners by thousands. Like his master, he literally "went about doing good."

A WIFE AND MONEY.

Whether true or not, I hardly know, but it is said that when clergymen select a woman for a wife, they generally if not always take one with a *good dowry*,—that is with a good fortune. Money answereth all things, saith the Scripture, so good Rowland Hill married a lady, with some money, as we say. But she possessed what is better than money, true religion, combined with an Evangelistic spirit like her young husband, therefore she often travelled with him and the pony, and helped him much in his good work of preaching the gospel to "the common people."

HIGHWAYMEN.

In their journeyings from place to place, often through mud and mire, dark lanes, and over lonely commons, they sometimes met with unpleasant things. On one occasion, when passing through a lonely glen, they were beset with highwaymen, who, I suppose, as was the fashion in those days, demanded their money or their life. Mr. Hill says, that instead of complying with their demands, he stood up in the carriage and made all the terrific roars, screams and shouts he could think of, so that before he had done the highwaymen took to their heels and fled. Being pitch dark and Rowland being a tall, big man, perhaps with his usual black cloak on, the robbers hastily concluded that they had "got the wrong pig by the ear" this time. One of the them was heard to say that they had "stopped *the Devil* by mistake and he had better be off." Being full of resources, of one kind or another, he was seldom at a loss for means to get out of a scrape.

A CHURCH.

Although very happy and successful in his evangelistic work he often felt that he would like to have a church where he could build up a regular congregation and work

around it as a central hive. He did not care for "livings," as they were then called; he wanted the "bees" not the "hives." In due time Divine Providence opened a way as he had desired and earnestly prayed for in the South of London, where there were few churches and thousands of people without the gospel, the churches of the establishment and even Lady Huntingdon's churches being still closed against him.

Surrey Chapel, Blackfriars road, was erected chiefly by his own means, left him on the death of his father, and opened for public worship in 1783, Mr. Hill preaching the first sermon. He also accepted the pastorate, but only on the condition that he be allowed several months annually to go on evangelistic tours through the country.

THE DEVIL AND CORNERS.

Surrey Chapel, which I have seen, was a plain round brick building, with a dome in centre, without any architectural pretensions, and somewhat unattractive and dingy. He said he built it round, for the devil could not then get in any corners. It would seat from 2,000 to 3,000 persons, and for a long period was one of the best attended and most popular places of worship in London. No one going up to the Metropolis from the country or from the United States would think of returning without going to Surrey Chapel to hear Rowland Hill. In this sense, for more than half a century he was the Spurgeon of London, and his usefulness and popularity knew no waning to the last. For this long period there was no name more widely known or more highly esteemed in the Christian ministry than his. It was a name of power in the land. The Gospel he preached was a Gospel of power, which when applied by the agency of the Holy Spirit shook the consciences of sinners, stirred the hearts of lukewarm Christians, convinced skeptics, and turned many from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the light and liberty of God.

WIT AND GOOD TASTE.

A writer in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says that not infrequently he violated the laws of good taste in the eccentricities of his wit and humor, but the intensity and purity of purpose, by which he was actuated, enabled him always to retain unimpaired his moral influence over his audiences. Behind his wit and humor there was a godly character, which always gave solidity and strength to his ministry. The people believed in him, loved him, and therefore flocked in crowds to hear him.

NO IMITATOR.

He was a man of strong individuality, he never imitated any one, and no one ever successfully imitated him. He was always Rowland Hill, and no one else. He could never be compared to, or with any other preacher. There were some who were more logical and more eloquent, but few who were more successful in winning souls. And that should be, and is, the sole aim, in preaching, of every "good minister of Jesus Christ."

A PARADISE OF DEVILS.

The good John Berridge, the Vicar of Everton, one of the leading evangelical clergymen of those times, when writing to Lady Huntingdon, said that Rowley had fixed upon one of the worst spots in London on which to build his chapel. It was at that time the very paradise of devils. Fine soil, said he, for planting and sowing, please send up a volley of prayers for its success. Surrey Chapel will be placed, he repeated, in the *very middle* of the devil's territories. What a bellowing and a clamour the old enemy will make. He may storm and rage, but Christ's cause must and will prevail, and so it did. Mr. Berridge must have belonged to the Salvation Army of those times, for he always speaks of the old enemy, the devil, as if he knew him well. Rowland Hill did not confine his labors to the *inside* of the Chapel.

HIS FERRETS.

He organized a company of preachers and workers and called them his ferrets. He was himself the centre and life of this organization, the members of which went forth into "the high ways and hedges and streets and lanes of the city," compelling men to come into the House of the Lord. They visited the sick, relieved the poor, instructed the ignorant, and went about doing good to the bodies as well as to the souls of men. In this work for a long time they were often in peril and received but scant returns, but they persevered and at length were rewarded with signal success. Mr. Hill himself almost constantly

held open air services in the locality of the chapel and in the surrounding districts. In this preaching work he had generally efficient helps, who assisted him in carrying on the work. He was by nature and habit, voice and manner, well fitted for the work of out-door preaching, and "the common people heard him gladly" by thousands. His grand central theme everywhere and at all times was "Christ crucified." His Gospel was Christ always and Christ everywhere, as the *only* saviour of men.

FIRST SUNDAY SCHOOL

It is believed that he opened the first Sunday school in London in Surrey Chapel, which was soon followed by others in various parts of the parish. For many years, until, and long after the close of his min- [illegible] there were four thousand children [illegible] his thirteen schools, and the [illegible] numbered about four hundred. [illegible] schools, alms houses, and [illegible] benevolent institutions were also [illegible] connection with Surrey [illegible] not a mere Sunday preach- [illegible] ation, like many of the churches of the present day. Rather, it was a moral and spiritual mill always grinding corn to feed the hungry souls and bodies of men, whether rich or poor. Its machinery never grew rusty, or stood still for want of spiritual grist. It was kept bright and brisk night and day all the year round. Like our electric lights on the street, it diffused its bright light, chasing away surrounding gloom and darkness, shining more and more as the years passed on. Like their minister, the Surrey Chapel people were strong, active and liberal. For a long period their annual collections for the British and Foreign Bible Society, missions and other benevolent objects were the largest of any one church in London.

PREACHER.

For over sixty years it is believed that he averaged three hundred and fifty sermons a year, making a total of upwards of twenty-one thousand. As he averaged almost a sermon a day, besides travelling thousands of miles annually, and also being otherwise engaged in various ways, for he was a philanthropist as well as preacher, he had no time to write his sermons. Except on important and special occasions, he did not believe in written sermons. There seems to have been but little method or logical arrangement in his discourses. He aimed to say something that would *strike* and *stick*, convict, convert and bring men to Christ, rather than to please or amuse them by fine essays on general gospel topics. In this he was successful, for although his sermons and methods appeared odd and strange, they perhaps made a greater impression and turned more from darkness to light than any other preacher of those times. He was so continually absorbed in the work of his Master that he had neither time nor desire to think of anything else. His

SALARY

from Surrey Chapel was never more than fifteen hundred dollars per annum, and much of this he gave away to the poor and needy. He was so full of Christian tenderness, and sympathy with suffering humanity, that his purse was often empty and his own needs were often supplied in a remarkable and providential way. His faith in God never failed him, so that he was free from anxiety and always carried a happy face and a pleasant countenance. This helped him much in his preaching tours, for the people could see that he had been with Jesus. He would gladly wander from his text, if by so doing he could bring a wandering sinner back to Christ. He was above all, a soul winner. His fine

PERSONALITY,

as well as his bland and happy face, no doubt assisted him in making a good impression on his audiences on his first appearance. He was tall, dignified and gentlemanly in his bearing, full of good humor, always ready with a good pleasant story, and always willing to hear one.

IN DOCTRINE

he was a moderate Calvinist, of the Spurgeon type, he therefore at the time of the Armenian controversy between Toplady, Wesley and Fletcher took sides with the former. But, nevertheless, he was in the fullest sense evangelical, and preached the Gospel to all sinners, as if he had been the broadest Armenian, and few preachers were ever more successful in bringing sinners to Christ.

WOTTON-UNDER-EDGE.

Mr. Hill built a chapel at Wotton, in Gloucestershire, in which he often preached when absent from London, but he had a

r gular minister stationed there, who sometimes exchanged with him and preached in Surrey Chapel. Mr. Hill humorously described himself as "the rector of Surrey Chapel, vicar of Wotton, and curate of all the fields and lanes throughout England and Wales." He also describes his assistant at Wotton as "a plain bawling Welshman," and advises him to "never mind breaking grammar if the Lord enabled him to break hearts and bring souls to Christ."

The Rev. R. Knill, father-in-law of the Rev. Charles Chapman, M.A., formerly pastor of Zion Church of this city, was for some years minister of Wotton chapel, and colleague of the Rev. Rowland Hill. During his absence in the country, and while at Wotton, the celebrated Rev. W Jay, minister for 64 years of Argyle chapel, Bath., also preached for him at Surrey Chapel, every summer, for the period of 40 years, and when Mr. Hill died he preached his funeral sermon. Mr. Jay speaks of him, as a man of learning, and of very superior talents, with an uncommon quickness of apprehension, and a great fund of general knowledge. "I go to hear Rowland Hill," said Sheridan, "because his ideas come *red hot* from the heart." The Rev. Mr. Jay applies the following poetic lines to Mr. Hill:

"Grant some of knowledge greater store,
More learned some in teaching;
Yet few in life did lighten more,
Or thunder more in preaching."

ECCLESIASTICAL PREFERENCES.

Although Surrey Chapel was practically Independent, he disliked strict Independency. Being brought up and educated an Episcopalian, he had a strong liking for the Liturgy and for the Episcopal service, which was always kept up at Surrey Chapel. But at one of his last interviews with Mr. Jay, he said: "Ah, Mr. Jay, Presbyterianism comes much nearer the original and scriptural model than your Independency or our Episcopacy; you know this was always my sentiment." From his peculiar circumstances he was driven to study the polity of the various denominations very closely, and the result was his decided preference for Presbyterianism. Neither prelacy nor the democracy of Congregationalism suited his tastes, for in principle they are both very much alike, as Independency and Congregationalism simply means being *ruled* generally by some one lay Bishop,—"A Mr. Money Bags." If we must be *ruled* by some *one* man, let us have a real Bishop.

BAPTISTS.

Mr. Hill was a man of broad Catholic sentiments and used to say that Mr. Bigotry had broken his leg; we wished he had broken his neck, and yet it was difficult for him to conceal his dislike to the Baptists. After preaching for the minister of a Baptist close communion church, he sat down to commune with them, but was kindly told by one of the officials that he could not be allowed to sit at their table. "*Your* table, he exclaimed. I thought it was *the Lord's* table, and I know I should be welcome there." He thought the Baptists should either close their pulpits to preachers of other denominations, or else open their communion to all Christians. Consistency called for this.

On one occasion, in a company of preachers, Mr. Hill, addressing a certain Baptist minister, said: Brother, there is one text that I can preach from and you can't. What text is that said the Baptist? "He sent me not to baptise, but to preach the gospel," was the reply. All present enjoyed the pun, and the Baptist brother most of all.

A LONG MINISTRY.

After working and preaching for sixty-six years, fifty of which he had been minister of Surrey Chapel, the infirmities of age began to show themselves. His eyes and memory began to fail, his step was less firm, and his once erect and dignified form was now bending toward mother earth, so that it was necessary that his faithful servant Charles should be constantly by his side, It is said that before starting for church to preach, Charles always had to ask him a number of questions, such as—Have you got your spectacles, sir? Yes, Charles. Your white pocket-handkerchief? Yes, Charles. Your colored one? Yes, Charles. And then with one of his peculiar winks, he would add—"Yes, Charles, and my *nose* too!"

Preaching was a master passion with him. It was all through life a glorious hobby of his. He continued to preach until he was only within one year of ninety, and when he was unable to stand, and nearly blind, he sat upon a high stool in the pulpit and had his texts copied in

large letters, from which he often sweetly discoursed of heaven and divine things.

A THRILLING SCENE.

A little while before he had finished his course, having preached in a neighboring church on a Sunday evening, when leaving the vestry for the door of the church, after the congregation was gone, amid profound silence, nothing being heard but his own slow footsteps, he was overheard, in low tones, to repeat the following stanza:—

"And when I'm to die,
Receive me, I'll cry,
For Jesus hath loved me, I cannot tell why;
But this I can find,
We two are so joined,
He'll not be in glory, and leave me behind."

To my heart, says the minister for whom he had been preaching (Mr. Clayton), this was a scene of unequalled solemnity, nor can I ever recur to it without a revival of that *hallowed, sacred, shuddering sympathy*, which it originally awaked. He departed this life in April, 1833, and his remains were interred in front of the pulpit in Surrey Chapel, where he had preached for half a century. A bust and tablet were placed, with suitable inscription, behind the pulpit. His last words were to a friend at his bedside—"I have no rapturous joys, but peace—a good hope through grace—all of grace." In this state he passed through the valley and shadow of death into the eternal calm and sunshine of heaven.

HIS ECCENTRICITIES.

We will now speak of some of his peculiarities. When leaving his London parsonage and chapel for the country for the last time, it must have been affecting and sad to see him walk around from place to place and from room to room, bidding all and everything farewell—the church, the pulpit, the vestry, the study, the stable, the kitchen, the servants, and the old cat that used to keep his feet warm in winter and curl her tail around his legs. He was tender and kind to every living thing, and was once heard to say from the pulpit that he would not give a farthing for a man's religion if his cat and dog were not the better for it. With sorrow, and yet with gratitude to God for allowing him to preach so long and happily, he bade all a final adieu, trusting in the Lord.

In his Village Dialogues, which ran through 34 editions, he speaks of the characteristics of preachers, designates some as "Tap Casks," "Slap Dashers," and "Slop Dashers," and he intimates that none of them carry the true ring of the gospel preacher.

When spoken to about letting so much wit and humor out, in his sermons, he was not quite so ready with an answer, as was the late Mr. Beecher, when he said to the complainer, "Oh you don't know how much I keep in." Many came to hear his wit, and to ridicule him, but who remained to pray.

When he returned from a preaching tour to Scotland, he complained of the many sects and names, such as the "Lifters," and "Antilifters," etc. One of their ministers was ordained by the imposition of hands, but one of the elders, who, I suppose, was a little man, could not reach his hand high enough to place it on the top of the young ministers' head, so he put the head of his walking stick where his hand should have been, and went away feeling satisfied that he had done his duty. Well, said Mr. Hill, the stick did equally well, for it was putting *timber to timber*.

The old Squire, his father, was greatly chagrined at his son Rowland turning preacher, and did all he could to prevent him. At first, after various warnings and remonstrances, he reduced his annual allowance of money, and then he for a time dropped it altogether. But that made no difference with Rowland, for he had well counted the cost. He even rejoiced to suffer poverty and persecution for Christ's sake. On one occasion the Squire hearing some one speaking in a loud voice, at some little distance from the Hall inquired what was going on. I suppose, said Richard, his brother, that it is Rowland preaching. Go and fetch him to me at once, said the father. So Richard, who was himself a Christian, went and told Rowland that his father wanted him immediately. He promptly obeyed, but told Richard that he must finish the sermon. So when Rowland got to his father he asked him why the noise continued. O, said he, I suppose it is Richard preaching!

When a minister, who had not the best of reputations, appeared anxious lest the sexton would not be on time with his cassock. O never mind, said Mr. Hill, I can preach without my cassock, but I cannot preach without my *character*.

A somewhat conceited young man called upon him and asked him if he had heard that he was going to change his senti-

but if you have not fixed the time, I would advise you to do it as near the *change of the moon* as possible.

A very talkative woman said to him, I have been much among the Roman Catholics lately, and I have been greatly tempted to change my religion. Indeed, ma'am, said he, I was not aware until now that you had any religion to change.

He was an intimate friend of Dr. Jenner, and a great believer in vaccination, so that he carried vaccine in his pocke. and vaccinated thousands—meeting with some who were bitterly opposed to it, as they said, because it was very disagreeable and offensive in communicating a disease from a filthy beast into a human being.

A filthy beast, said he. Do you call a *cow* a filthy beast? Why everything about her is most agreeable, wholesome and useful. She supplies our tables with meat, butter, cheese, milk and cream. I assure you, that I would much rather *eat* a *cow* than a *Christian*.

When leaving the vestry for the pulpit one Sunday morning in a church in which he had been invited to preach, one of the officials met him and said,—We only preach to the *elect* here. Neither will I, said he, if you will go and set a mark upon them. He remarked afterwards that he would as soon see *the devil* in the pulpit, as an Antinomian. He loved to be regarded as "the apostle of the common people," and they generally heard him gladly. As a preacher he exerted a mighty influence over them, throughout England and Wales.

I do think, he used to say, that once in my life I did earn my daily bread. I was spending several weeks in North Wales with a friend and she made me preach for every meal, so I had to mount the pulpit *four* times a day, that is, before breakfast, dinner, tea and supper. They have *four* meals a day in England, you know."

He always spoke of his Master's work as "sweet service" and "perfect freedom." In one week, when past seventy-one, he travelled a hundred miles in a mountainous part of Wales, and preached twenty-one sermons—three a day!

He was never idle; for recreation he would make nets, little shoes for children, small boxes, and ponds in his garden for frogs and toads. His garden was a joy to him, in which he cultivated flowers, fruits, plants and trees to great perfection.

A HYMN WRITER.

He loved music and poetry, and was himself quite a respectable hymn writer. He wrote beautiful hymns for children, for he never forgot that he was first brought to think about religion and Christ by reading Dr. Watts' songs for children.

I will give two verses each, from two of his hymns, the first from his "Divine Hymns for Children," and the second from his hymns for adults:—

Dear Jesus, let an infant claim,
The favour to adore thy name,
Thou wast so weak that babes might be,
Encouraged to draw nigh to Thee.

My gracious Saviour, I believe,
Thou canst a little child receive,
Thy tender love for us is free,
And why not love poor sinful me

Dear Friend of friendless sinners hear,
And magnify Thy grace divine;
Pardon a worm that would draw near,
That would his heart to Thee resign;
A worm by self and sin oppressed
That pants to reach Thy promised rest

With holy fear and reverent love,
I long to lie beneath Thy Throne,
I long in Thee to live and move,
And charge myself on Thee alone,
Teach me to lean upon Thy breast,
To find in Thee the promised rest.

THE END.

I should perhaps say in conclusion that Mr. Hill was succeeded by the Rev. James Sherman, who seldom preached without weeping. Mr. Sherman was succeeded by the Rev. Newman Hall, both of whom I have heard preach with much pleasure. Many changes have taken place in relation to Surrey Chapel and its surroundings. The Rev. Newman Hall, some years ago, erected a large and imposing edifice with high towers and spires, which has been designated "Christ's Church." A large hall for Evangelistic meetings was also erected at the same time, as a part of the Church building. It is called "Hawkstone Hall," being named after the family seat of the Hills' in Shropshire. The cost of the whole building amounted to upwards of $300,000. "Christ's Church" is the centre of a great Evangelistic and Sunday school work, which is constantly going on all the year round, under the able direction of Mr. Hall, the pastor, who is a worthy successor of Rowland Hill, who being dead yet speaketh, and his works do follow him.